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Science, Poetry, and “Order among the Clouds”: Thoreau and Luke Howard

Bradley P. Dean

On Thursday, 20 November 1851, right around 8:30 A.M., Thoreau was riding to work—which on that particular day, as indeed for the week preceding, was the Ministerial Lot past West Concord near present-day Harrington Avenue, a three-mile commute from his home on Main Street. He rode, presumably on a wagon, because he was surveying the lot and needed to bring along his surveying instruments. An assistant may have accompanied him. Off to his right in the western sky, and also over his left shoulder in the east, white clouds were arranged in a “striking symmetry,” ray-wise, “as if the sun’s rays had split and so arranged them.” A rough sketch in his journal entry for that day, reproduced here, gives a rudimentary idea of what he saw. As it happened, a month and a day later, on 21 December, the sky presented a similar appearance, which he described in his journal entry that day as “the melon-rind jig,” for the pattern in the sky reminded him of the distinctive pattern on the outer surface of a melon. Later he would index both of the journal passages in which he described these skies as “melon-rind sky.” It was a description he would continue to apply to such skies for the remainder of his life. On that Thursday morning in November 1851 he wondered what accounted for the phenomenon: “What [is] its law?” he wrote at the end of the paragraph in his journal.

Between these two journal entries about cloud patterns, an event occurred in Cambridge, Massachusetts, fifteen miles to the east of Concord, that seems to have provided Thoreau with another name for the distinctive pattern of his “melon-rind sky” and that went a good way toward explaining the law that accounted for the pattern. On Tuesday, 2 December 1851, Harvard College Librarian Dr. Thaddeus William Harris received a used thirty-nine-page pamphlet that he had purchased for the Library’s collection using funds bequeathed by Horace A. Haven of Portsmouth,

New Hampshire (Harvard Class of 1842). The pamphlet had been published almost twenty years earlier, in 1832, by the London publishers Harvey and Darton. It was the first authorially approved reprint of a brief essay that had first appeared in 1803. The text of that original essay had been widely reprinted during the intervening twenty-nine years in encyclopedias and periodicals. Oddly, though, the Harvard College Library appears not to have secured a copy of the essay until Dr. Harris’s accession of 2 December 1851. On the title page of Harvard’s copy, the author had inscribed the pamphlet to the original owner, “From the author—Manchester 28 June 1842” (see image on next page).

The pamphlet, *Essay on the Modifications of Clouds*, contains about eleven thousand words, a thousand or so fewer than Thoreau’s essay “Walking.” Yet despite its brevity *Essay on the Modifications of Clouds* made a tremendous impact. The pamphlet catapulted its previously little-known author to international fame, particularly in scientific circles, where he was hailed as “The Godfather of Clouds” and was roundly and soundly applauded for having done for the skies what Linnaeus had done for plants and animals in 1735, when *Systema Naturae* was first published.

Luke Howard (1772-1864), a British Quaker, manufacturing chemist, and amateur meteorologist, had first delivered *Essay on the Modifications of Clouds* as a lecture in December 1802. His achievement was to introduce order among the clouds, one of nature’s most dynamic phenomena. In his lecture and in the published essay that followed the next year, he introduced seven names for cloud formations (he called them “modifications”), names that would eventually become familiar to every schoolchild: cirrus, cumulus, stratus, cirro-cumulus, cumulo-stratus, nimbus, and (the formation that Thoreau described as a “melon-rind sky”)

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cirro-stratus. Howard also described in some detail the various phenomena that combined to cause clouds to assume one or another formation—what might be called the law governing each of the seven “modifications.” The fascinating story of Howard and his famous essay has been well told in Richard Hamblyn’s history, *The Invention of Clouds: How an Amateur Meteorologist Forged the Language of the Skies* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001).

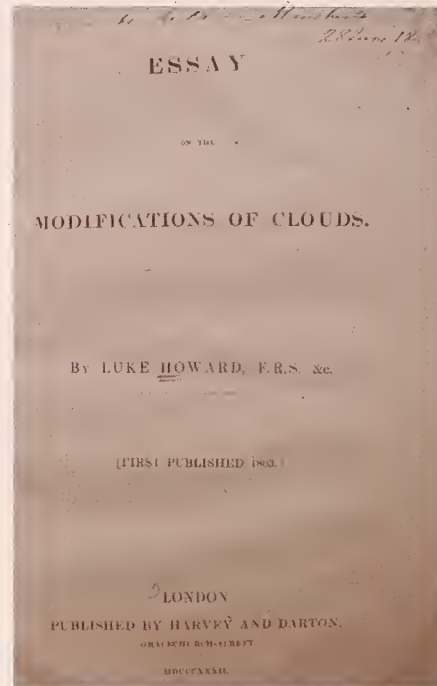
Did Thoreau read Howard’s *Essay on the Modifications of Clouds*? Robert Sattelmeyer does not cite any of Howard’s works in *Thoreau’s Reading: A Study in Intellectual History with Bibliographical Catalogue* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988) because Thoreau neither mentions Luke Howard by name nor quotes directly from Howard’s writings. Nonetheless, a fair amount of circumstantial evidence suggests that sometime between 2 and 18 February 1852—and probably during his visit to the Harvard Library on the former date—Thoreau did indeed read the pamphlet that Dr. Harris had acquired for the Harvard Library on 2 December 1851. Moreover, Howard’s essay appears to have prompted from Thoreau some interesting remarks about a fundamental ambivalence that he dealt with throughout the 1850s.

At about 6 P.M. on 3 February 1852, the day following his trip to the Harvard College Library, Thoreau walked under a clear sky to Fairhaven Cliffs via the railroad. Despite their absence, clouds were on his mind, as this passage from his journal of that day indicates: “The sun had set without a cloud in the sky—a rare occurrence—but I missed the clouds, which make the glory of evening. The sky must have a few clouds—as the mind a few moods—nor is the evening the less serene for them.” A quick computer search of his journal entries for each of the nine following Februarys (1853–1861) turns up just a single substantive comment about clouds, this one from his entry of 2 February 1860: “The cloud about the sun had a cold, dry, windy look, as if the cloud, elsewhere homogeneous cold slaty, were there electrified and arranged like iron-filings about the sun, its fibres, so to speak, more or less raying from the sun as a centre.” Although the passage in his journal of 3 February 1852, the passage about the absence of clouds, cannot be regarded as evidence of his having read Howard’s *Essay on the Modifications of Clouds* at Harvard the previous day, the passage does suggest that Dr. Harris might have brought Howard’s pamphlet to Thoreau’s attention at that time.

In the journal just over two weeks later, though, on 18 February 1852, a passage appears which suggests much more strongly that Thoreau had indeed read Howard’s *Essay on the Modifications of Clouds*: “One discovery in Meteorology, one significant observation is a good deal. I am grateful to the man who introduces order among the

clouds.” This certainly appears to be a reference to Luke Howard. But I should mention a possible caveat. Coincidentally, perhaps, Thoreau on 4 February 1852—yes, the day after his journal meditation about “missing the clouds” at the end of a clear day—attended a lecture on tornados at the Concord Lyceum by William Blasius (1818–

1899), who more than two decades later published a book with a provocative subtitle: *Storms: Their Nature, Classification and Laws. With the Means of Predicting Them by Their Embodiments the Clouds* (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, [c. 1875]). Although it seems to me unlikely, it is possible that Dr. Blasius during his lecture rehearsed Luke Howard’s cloud modifications for his audience and that



Thoreau learned about “the man who introduces order among the clouds” in this fashion. (Amusingly, Kenneth Walter Cameron in his transcript of the records of the Concord Lyceum misread the hastily scrawled listing of Blasius’ lecture as “Lorna do[one].”)

The last bit of evidence suggesting that Thoreau had read Howard’s essay is also to be gleaned from the journal. Nowhere in his journal *before* February 1852 does Thoreau use any of Howard’s distinctive names for clouds, but beginning with his mention of a *cumulus* cloud in April 1852 he employs Howard’s cloud names periodically. The twenty-three journal passages below, Thoreau’s remark on 18 February 1852 about his gratitude to “the man who introduces order among the clouds,” and his uncharacteristic meditation about clouds on a clear February day (3 February 1852)—these together suggest that Thoreau had read Harvard Library’s copy of Howard’s *Essay on the Modifications of Clouds* during or shortly after his visit of 2 February 1852:

1. [Entry of 10 April 1852] I observed [the aspect of the sky] in the south composed of short clouds horizontal and parallel to one another, each straight and dark below with a slight **cumulus** resting on it, a little marsh-wise.

2. [Entry of 14 April 1852] With snow on the ground the sky appears once more to wear the peculiar blue of winter and contrasts in like manner with small whitish **cumulus**, but there is not yet in the air the vapor you would expect from the evaporation from so much snow.

3. [Entry of 12 July 1852] The clouds—**cumuli** lie

in high piles along the Southern horizon—glowing downy or cream colored—broken into irregular summits in the form of bears erect—or demigods or rocking stones—infant Herculeses—and still we think that from their darker bases a thunder shower may issue.

4. [Entry of 2 August 1852] We have had a day or two (and here is another) of hanging clouds not threatening rain yet affording shade, so that you are but little incommoded by the sun in a long walk. Varied, dark, and downy **cumulus**—fair-weather clouds, well nigh covering the sky—with dark bases and white glowing fronts and brows.

5. [Entry of 29 May 1853] These are afternoons when you expect a thunder shower before night—the outlines of cloudy **cumuli** are dimly seen through the hazy furnace like air rising in the west—

6. [Entry of 1 March 1855] I did well to walk in the forenoon, the fresh and inspiring half of this bright day, for now, at mid-afternoon, its brightness is dulled, and a fine **stratus** is spread over the sky.

7. [Entry of 24 May 1855] Just before six, see in the northwest the first summer clouds, methinks, piled in **cumuli** with silvery edges, and westward of them a dull, rainy-looking cloud advancing and shutting down to the horizon; later, lightning in west and south and a little rain.

8. [Entry of 19 January 1856] There were eight or ten courses of clouds, so broad that with equal intervals of blue sky they occupied the whole width of the heavens, broad white **cirro-stratus** in perfectly regular curves from west to east across the whole sky.

9. [Entry of 9 June 1856] There are some large **cumuli** with glowing downy cheeks floating about.

10. [Entry of 11 June 1856] Great **cumuli** are slowly drifting in the intensely blue sky, with glowing white borders.

11. [Entry of 22 March 1858] I see those peculiar spring (?) clouds, scattered **cumuli** with dark level bases.

12. [Entry of 12 May 1858] The peculiarity seems to be that the sky is not generally overcast, but elsewhere, south and northeast, is a fair-weather sky with only innocent **cumuli**, etc., in it.

13. [Entry of 3 June 1858] Yet I was surprised to observe that a long, straggling downy **cumulus** extending north and south a few miles east of us, when the sun was perhaps an hour high, cast its shadow along the base of the Peterboro Hills, and did not fall on the other side, as I should have expected.

14. [Entry of 5 August 1858] The black willows are perhaps in their best condition,—airy, rounded masses of light green rising one above another, with a few slender black stems, like umbrella handles, seen here and there in their midst, low spreading **cumuli** of slender falcate leaves, buttressed by smaller sallows, button-bushes, cornels, and pontederias,—like long green clouds or wreaths of vapor resting on the riverside.

15. [Entry of 5 August 1858] The willows slumber along its shore, piled in light but low masses, even like the **cumuli** clouds above.

16. [Entry of 22 August 1858] [A large bird] screamed ... and finally soared higher and higher till it

was almost lost amid the clouds, or could scarcely be distinguished except when it was seen against some white and glowing **cumulus**.

17. [Entry of 13 December 1859] What an ever-changing scene is the sky with its drifting **cirrus** and **stratus**!

18. [Entry of 30 January 1860] Fair with a few **cumuli** of indefinite outline in the north and south, and dusky under sides.

19. [Entry of 23 March 1860] Small dark-based **cumuli** spring clouds, mostly in rows parallel with the horizon.

20. [Entry of 24 March 1860] Peculiar cold and windy **cumuli** are mixed with them [wind-clouds], not black like a thundercloud, but cold dark slate with very bright white crowns and prominences.

21. [Entry of 2 May 1860] There was considerable wind on the surface, from the northeast, and the above clouds were moving west and southwest,—a generally distributed **cumulus**. What added to the remarkableness of the sight was a very fine, fleecy **cirrus**, like smoke, narrow but of indefinite length, driving swiftly eastward beneath the former, proving that there were three currents of air, one above the other.

22. [Entry of 13 May 1860] The sky is full of glowing summer **cumuli**.

23. [Entry of 19 May 1860] [T]he shadows of the bright fair-weather **cumuli** are sweeping over them [grasses] like the shades of a watered or changeable stuff,—June-like.

Around the time of the publication of *A Week*, as several critics have pointed out, Thoreau began a fairly dramatic period of transition. Before May 1849 he had apparently aspired to be a poet-critic in the manner of James Russell Lowell. Two disturbing events occurred later that year, however, that played a role in Thoreau reassessing his aspirations: the commercial failure of *A Week*, which likely became apparent by around the beginning of September, and a falling out between Thoreau and his mentor, Emerson—a falling out that resulted largely, Linck Johnson has

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convincingly suggested (*Thoreau's Complex Weave*, pp. 257–258), from Emerson having criticized *A Week* only after its commercial failure was apparent, whereas he seems only to have praised the book before its publication and had even encouraged Thoreau to publish the book at his (Thoreau's) own expense.

In any case, gradually, as a result of his mid-career reassessment in the fall of 1849, Thoreau began focusing his attention on the formal study of nature. In other words, during the year or two after the late summer of 1849, he was more or less consciously refashioning himself from a young poet-critic to a middle-aged poet-naturalist, to use Ellery Channing's later description of his friend. After this period of transition there would be no more book reviews like "Paradise (To Be) Regained," no more essays on literary figures such as Carlyle and Raleigh. Instead, Thoreau became what we would nowadays recognize as a nature writer, albeit a nature writer with a strongly ethical bent.

The journal reflects this transition, of course, and many journal passages show that Thoreau was extremely aware of and ambivalent about the heightened interest he was giving to natural history studies. On several occasions in his journals of the early 1850s he contrasts "science," the objective study of and relation to nature, with "poetry" or a more subjective assessment of and (to use Emerson's happy phrase) "original relation" to nature. As these journal poetry-versus-science passages make clear, Thoreau was concerned that the more scientific his studies became, the more his poetic responses to nature would suffer.

This attitude toward poetry and science placed him in something of a dilemma, however, because one of the principal reasons for his decision to study nature formally appears to have been a keen realization: as he grew older, his relation to nature became less spontaneous, less magical, and the only viable way to recover the poetic quality of his youthful relation with nature was to study nature formally, consciously. This dilemma was one of the central problems he faced during the last decade of his life. How could he practice what he later called "a science which deals with the higher law" without becoming a scientist? Or, to phrase the question differently, can there be such a thing as a transcendental scientist? The first three paragraphs of his journal entry of 16 July 1851 are especially relevant in this regard. The paragraphs are essentially a paean to the spontaneous and ineffable glories of his youth, but with enormous significance (and some poignancy) the paean ends: "With all your science can you tell how it is—and whence it is—that light comes into the soul?"



Luke Howard

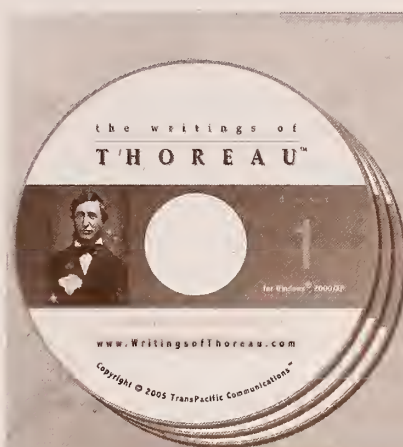
Thoreau's presumptive reading of Howard's *Essay on the Modifications of Clouds* in early February 1852 had the

effect, I suggest, of heightening his sense of the predicament in which he found himself during the early 1850s. Clouds are almost intrinsically romantic in the sense that they are fleeting, mercurial, evanescent. Romantics might be said to dote upon clouds more ardently than upon primroses, whereas any self-respecting scientist, one might have claimed, would eschew clouds altogether because, surely, clouds cannot be fixed, cannot be defined with anything like the rigor science demands.

The pre-Howardian romantic attitude toward clouds was so intrinsic to the way most people conceived of them that Howard dealt with this matter in the second and third sentences of his essay, albeit somewhat tangentially: "If Clouds were the mere result of the condensation of Vapour in the masses of atmosphere which they occupy, if their variations were produced by the movements of the atmosphere alone, then indeed might the study of them be deemed an useless pursuit of shadows, an attempt to describe forms which, being the sport of winds, must be ever varying, and therefore not to be defined. But however the erroneous admission of this opinion may have operated to prevent attention to them, the case is not so with Clouds." Despite the assumption and perhaps the most fervent hopes of the romantically inclined, even those most seemingly dynamic of natural phenomena, the clouds, can be fixed, defined, named, categorized, and studied, as science demands.

So just how grateful was Thoreau to Howard, really, for "introduc[ing] order among the clouds"? The very next sentence in his journal entry of 18 February 1852 tells the tale: "Yet I look up into the heavens so fancy free, I am almost glad not to know any law for the winds." He could study the heavens under his feet with some equanimity, but he preferred the heavens over his head to remain unsullied by study. With the poetic-scientific implications of Howard's essay still in his mind, I suspect, he ended his journal entry with the following brief but provocative paragraph: "It is impossible for the same person to see things from the poet's point of view and that of the man of science. The poet's second love may be science, not his first, when use has worn off the bloom. I realize that men may be born to a condition of mind at which others arrive in middle age by the decay of their poetic faculties."

Luke Howard, having been born to a scientific condition of mind, it would appear, introduced order among those prized playthings of the romantic imagination: clouds. Thoreau, on the other hand, had been born to a poetic condition of mind and preferred to "look up into the heavens ... fancy free," unencumbered by the impulse to fix and define and name and categorize in order to study. He wanted to *behold*, not *inspect*, as he phrased the dichotomy in his early essay-review, "Natural History of Massachusetts." But because "use had worn off the bloom" of his innately poetic mind, he recognized that he would



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need to cultivate what had ambivalently become his “second love,” science—or, as he preferred to call his practice, natural history. The formal study of nature, he hoped, would restore to him something of the magic of his youthful reveries. If Thoreau did read Howard’s essay during the first half of February 1852—and some fairly compelling circumstantial evidence suggests he did—the experience seems to have exacerbated the tensions between poetry and science that arose from his mid-career transition from a poet-critic to a poet-naturalist.

The Machine in the Garden: Re-Imagining Thoreau’s Plumbago Grinder

Randall Conrad

Summer and winter, a pair of up-ended, rusty, criss-crossing shafts crowned with reddish-colored gears sprouts from the mud of a conservation site in Acton known as the Pencil Factory Dam. These iron perennials, remnants of late nineteenth-century industry, are the silent marker of a still earlier enterprise on the same site, a mill that once thrived on steady custom from the Thoreau pencil business in neighboring Concord. This was my starting point for the casual scholarly inquiry into an intriguing invention of Thoreau’s which I recount here.

The mill belonged to Ebenezer “Eben” Wood (1792–1880), remembered as a “cabinet maker, inventor, Mason, veteran of the War of 1812, and a gentleman.” For many years beginning in the 1830s, Wood ground plumbago (now called graphite or black lead—the essence of pencil “lead”) exclusively for the successful Thoreau company, manufacturers of industry-leading writing and drawing implements.

Wood, a pioneering pencil-maker and inventor himself, is credited with “using the first circular saw in the pencil business, inventing a grooving machine, a molding and trimming machine, a wedge glue press, [and] creating the hexagonal and octagonal [rather than round] pencil—and patenting none of them.”¹

All these inventions support the manufacture of the pencil’s cedar “case,” the familiar wooden cylinder that encases the shaft of “lead” (powdered graphite mixed with clay). Assuming Wood brought in cedar and used his novel machinery on site, his mill served as a complete pencil factory. Nineteenth-century Acton counted at least three such

pencil factories among its various mills.

In neighboring Concord, Henry Thoreau put the family concern on the road to success by contributing ingenious engineering solutions as well as physical labor. The reigning historian of pencil manufacturing, Henry Petroski, devotes an entire chapter of his definitive history, *The Pencil*, to Henry, his father John Thoreau, Sr., and their innovative collaborations. Most famously, Henry discovered and implemented a groundbreaking improvement in the lead-making process by substituting clay for traditional fillers. As a result, high-quality Thoreau pencils were soon in wide demand and won Mechanic Association awards at fairs in 1847 and 1849 (Petroski 110–120).

One intriguing contrivance designed and constructed by father and son in the 1830s, the subject of this article, was the very thing which “at once put their black lead for fineness at the head of all manufactured in America,” according to Edward W. Emerson:

[T]he narrow churn-like chamber around the mill-stones [was] prolonged some seven feet high, opening into a broad, close, flat box, a sort of shelf. Only lead-dust that was fine enough to rise to that height, carried by an upward draught of air, and lodge in the box was used, and the rest ground over. (Emerson, *Young Friend*, 14)

Dr. Emerson’s description—the only one that has come down to us—clearly portrays Thoreau’s device as a fixture within the mill itself, extending the walls surrounding the millstones.

But men of letters, alas, blithely stringing sentences together in the all-verbal universe they inhabit, cannot always be trusted to picture to themselves the material thing they are writing about, especially if they have never seen an image of it. I re-learned this unhappy truth while trying to interpret a baffling second-generation “description” of the same device.

When Walter Harding borrowed Dr. Emerson’s description almost verbatim in his 1965 biography of Thoreau, he added an element found in some other source I

have not identified: "The machine spun around inside a box set on a table and could be wound up to run itself so it could easily be operated by his sisters" (*Days*, 56). A box set on a table? Both Thoreau sisters? Now it seemed I must visualize the Thoreaus' invention as a home-based or portable contrivance, rather than a mill-based fixture.

For a time, I tried to visualize this hybrid rig standing in one of the work-sheds annexed to the Parkman House (the Thoreau residence since 1844). I wondered how a table, itself more than two feet high, could anywhere indoors accommodate a seven-foot tower with a receptacle on top. Even the high-ceilinged parlors in the Yellow House reached only nine feet, and the Thoreaus didn't move there until 1850 (*Days*, 263). Petroski takes note of the additional sentence, yet his book offers no comment as to how these two descriptors can apply to the same machine (Petroski, 114).

I supposed the flat, shelf-like "box" at the top of the extension could have been detachable, in order for someone to collect the powder easily, but was it roomy enough to accommodate a spinning "machine" inside? And if so, what action did the machine perform? If located inside the seven-foot tower, the whirligig was probably an air-circulator that pulled a draft upward. If located inside a flat, elongated table-top box, what was it then? Whatever it was, wouldn't any mechanism hamper the accumulation of ultra-light powder inside these narrow confines?

At this point a phone conversation with Petroski, professor of both civil engineering and history at Duke University, tended to support the original idea of the mill-based tower. Harding's "table," after all, could refer to a platform erected over the millstones that were doing the grinding. The "spinning" machine, Petroski confirmed, was surely a rotary fan located inside the tower and creating the upward draft of air needed to carry the finest powder to the top.

Harding's extra sentence, it now seems to me, could refer to some different machine—smaller, portable, and spring-wound—that functioned inside a portable "box" or case. In this form the machine might have been an altogether different invention, designed to continue the refining process in the privacy of the Thoreaus' home-based manufactory. I could suppose that inside the box the mysterious spinning mechanism, perhaps a centrifugal separator, reduced ground graphite to a finer and more uniform grade, with or without a current of air to assist.

But at this point I am only imagining—until someone can help to identify the source of Harding's second sentence.

Another question arose: why did John Thoreau and son need to produce a fine grade of graphite prior to the market demand created by electrotyping? Electrotype, the revolutionary industry that would require a quantum leap in milling technique, lay years in the future. Harding's plural reference to Henry's sisters, if it is accurate, would confirm

that this tabletop machine was in use as early as the 1830s or 1840s. (The year 1849 brought both the death of Helen Thoreau and the beginnings of electrotyping.) Perhaps John Thoreau experienced an early need to produce a more consistent grade of powder for specialized products such as the "plumbago Plates for Galvanic Batteries" advertised in a circular around 1844 (Meltzer and Harding, 138).

In the production of superior pencils—and Dr. Emerson was not exaggerating the market leadership of Thoreau's product—the graphite will distribute more evenly throughout the clay mixture if its grade is fine and uniform. However, as Petroski affirms in his book and confirmed in our phone conversation, achieving a still-finer granularity would not have been necessary to maintain market leadership. The Thoreau company innovated by marketing a reliable "polygrade" product line. That is, Thoreau and son graded their pencils according to the hardness of the lead. (This was the origin of today's "No. 2" pencil and its kin.) But varying the hardness is done by varying the proportion of clay in the mixture, not the grade of the graphite powder.

So probably none of my speculations about plumbago plates, etc., was relevant. The Thoreau mill extension may or may not have expedited volume production of uniform fine-grade graphite that the company required in later years. All it had to do was provide an edge in the pencil marketplace of the 1830s.

My rambling researches, like a Thoreau excursion, brought me back to where I started—the Pencil Factory Dam site. It had sprouted an informative visitors' kiosk in the years since my first visit, created by Eagle Scout Jeff LeBlanc and members of the Acton Land Stewardship Committee, with state funding.² One fact for certain, I supposed—the Thoreau mill-extension was located in Acton. Or maybe it was in Concord. The visitors' kiosk is silent on the issue.

Eben Wood's Acton mill was still working for the Thoreau company as late as 1853, the point when John Thoreau shifted the family pencil-manufacturing firm to the more lucrative (and secretive) business of producing fine graphite powder in volume. It was Henry who would drive to Acton to bring the ground graphite home in bulk, where the Thoreaus secretly boxed orders that would be shipped to customers in other cities (*Young Friend*, 15; *Days*, 261).

Horace Hosmer (1830-1894), an alumnus of the Thoreau brothers' Concord Academy who became a pencil-finisher in Acton (and occasionally a salesman or business representative for John Thoreau's company), leased Wood's mill for five years "for Pencil Work," presumably during the 1850s. There Hosmer observed, and very possibly lent a hand to, Wood's graphite-grinding for John Thoreau. He later recalled "how particular *Mrs.* Thoreau was to have it fine and of uniform quality" (Hosmer, 32; Hosmer's emphasis).

Since Henry was making round trips to Acton,

conceivably the pencil factory's mill may have been dedicated to the specialized function of producing the uniform fine-grade powder required by electrotyping, while "the coarse grinding was now done at the mill at Loring's Lead Works in Concord Junction" (*Days*, 263). If so, this would tend to confirm that Henry Thoreau's fine-grinding mill-extension was located in Acton, in Wood's mill. Or perhaps he oversaw the installation of a next-generation version at that site.

An additional argument for the Acton location of Thoreau's device comes from an undated (circa 1890s) photograph owned by the Acton Historical Society and reproduced here by their permission. (It is also reproduced in Klauer, 18). Davis Road in those days extended along the dam, as shown in the photo. (The photographer was standing on the dam.) The same railroad tracks that are overgrown today can be seen in this picture—it's that horizontal line intersecting Davis Road's vertical path and bisecting the middle distance.



The photo shows an active railroad: the bar-shaped sign above the intersection in the photo, not legible at this resolution, reads "Watch Out for the Engine." On the site of today's rusting gears and shafts are two buildings—a three-story structure with windows, and in front of it a much smaller house with no visible windows, possibly a single-story studio. According to local historian William A. Klauer, "The graphite grading equipment may have been in the small structure.... It appears that this building had some kind of heating equipment (since it also has a chimney), and the pencils were manufactured in the larger building" (Klauer, 18).

On the other hand, when Dr. Emerson saw the thing at work, it was apparently in Concord: "Mr. Miles took me to his mill to see the perfection and simplicity of the operation" (*Young Friend*, 56). Warren Miles was the owner of a sawmill in Concord on Nut Meadow Brook, housed in slabs of old sapwood on an existing mill-dam, about two miles from the Thoreau family's Yellow House. Miles also ground graphite for the Thoreaus. (Most mills served a range of

customers and industries.)

In his journal, Thoreau recorded several visits to Miles in 1856, noting that Miles "at his mill near the factory ... used a small undershot wheel, eighteen inches in diameter, for grinding lead" (entry of 24 April 1856). Note, however, Thoreau's use of the past tense. It confirms that the "mill near the factory" was an older facility, distinct from Miles's "new mill" at Nut Meadow, which Thoreau was currently visiting.³

Warren Miles, by his own account, was the first to suggest that Thoreau begin using stone instead of traditional "iron pots and balls" to grind graphite.⁴ He and Thoreau collaborated in 1858 on a "crushing method" that was an improvement. Miles eventually purchased the Thoreau business from Cynthia Thoreau (Emerson, *Notes of Interviews*).

It is, of course, perfectly possible that more than one Thoreau contrivance existed by 1856, so that both the Wood mill and the Miles mill would have contained one. Finally, since the Thoreaus (like Eben Wood) never patented their inventions, this influential device may have been widely replicated.

I am obliged to report, in sum, that I am still in the dark as to what purpose was served by the Thoreau invention as early as the 1830s, and equally clueless as to which town was its location. Nevertheless, like any Thoreau research, my adventure bore rewards of its own. Notably, the mill pond at Nut Meadow inspired eloquent journal pages in which Thoreau exults in its wildlife, human visitors, and ecology (see, for instance, the entry of 28 February 1856, VIII:190-94). And although Thoreau left no description of his own mill extension, Nut Meadow did inspire a clear-eyed description of sawmill construction: "How simple the machinery of the mill! Miles has dammed a stream, raised a pond or head of water, and placed an old horizontal mill-wheel in position to receive a jet of water on its buckets, transferred the motion to a horizontal shaft and saw by a few cog-wheels and simple gearing, and, throwing a roof of slabs over all, at the outlet of the pond, you have a mill."

Thoreau, who knew a thing or two about mills, added one caveat. Miles should have constructed a new dam, he thought, rather than using a century-old dam that had already given way once, necessitating troublesome repairs. "Rude forces, rude men, and rude appliances," he concluded (VIII:193).

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Notes

1. *Eben Wood remembered: Acton Land Stewardship Committee* web site, <http://town.acton.ma.us/LSCOM/EAPencils.htm>. *Ground plumbago exclusively for Thoreaus*: Harding, *Days*, 17. *Credited with using first circular saw, etc.:* in Conant. Henry Petroski, however, disputes the attribution of primacy in respect to creating more comfortable cylinders: octagonal cases were made as early as the seventeenth century (e-mail to author, 30 October 2002).

2. The full story and credits are at <http://town.acton.ma.us/LSCOM/News010614.htm>.

3. "When Miles first worked for them [the Thoreaus] it was at Hayward's Mill at Factory Village." The Nut Meadow mill was used subsequently: "Warren Miles said, I think, that later he ground it for them in [name left blank] Brook near Marshall Miles's house" (Emerson, typescript of "H. D. Thoreau"). Dr. Emerson interviewed Warren Miles on two or three occasions in the fall of 1890. The essential material found its way into *Thoreau as Remembered by a Young Friend*, but there is more detail in the manuscript notes. "Factory Village," a place Thoreau would survey in 1859, was a small industrial section of Concord on the Assabet River that had its heyday in the 1840s and 1850s (Hammond).

4. "Presumably," Dr. Emerson supposed, "this was after the Thoreaus' invention of the air-blast which gave the wonderfully fine powder to which they owed their success, for, before that, the grit of the stones would have spoiled their product" (*Young Friend*, 56).

The author wishes to thank Betsy Conant at the Acton Historical Society, Bill Klauer, and Henry Petroski.

Obituary: Bob Patterson

Ernie Seckinger

On 10 May 2005, just outside of Franklin, Georgia, the Thoreau Society lost a fellow who might be described as one of its more anonymous members, for Bob Patterson was a man of the masses, not of the podium or of academe—one of the many individuals since 1854 who read the words of *Walden* and built a life on them. But Bob built a foundation for himself that featured two pillars, only one of which was Thoreauvian



Transcendentalism. The other was a heartfelt and, in many ways, fundamentalist Christianity. In both of these pillars he defied all stereotypes. Bob believed deeply in the equality of all, the wisdom of Henry Thoreau, and the divinity of Jesus. Unlike some bellicose Christian fundamentalists, Bob lived his beliefs, along with his wife Cynthia, with whom he adopted two daughters. One never knew what would come out when he opened his mouth to speak: a mini-sermon with a slightly proselytizing quality, or a line from Thoreau or Emerson. Before his death he boasted that he had read *Walden* thirty times and was proud to point out that he found new meaning and deeper wisdom with each new reading.

John M. Dolan (1937–2005)

Dale R. Schwie

John M. Dolan, philosophy professor at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, died on 14 September 2005 nearly eight years after being diagnosed with cancer. He was 68. His intellectual interests ranged from medical ethics and logic to literary criticism and the writings of Thoreau. John was a co-editor with Wendell Glick of *The Thoreau Quarterly*, a journal devoted to literary and philosophical studies.

John loved to teach, and he had a genuine respect for his students. He believed that "The powers lying dormant in these students await occasions that stir them into life. A 'teacher' speaking with

enthusiasm, knowledge, and love about some important subject can sometimes create such occasions." John believed this and practiced it, perhaps no more enthusiastically than when he was teaching Thoreau and



Walden. John encouraged his graduate students in a philosophy course on *Walden* to approach the study as a labor of love, just as he did in teaching the course. Perhaps the most enjoyable Thoreau classes for John were a series of two-day weekend seminars offered through the University of Minnesota's Compleat Scholar program. These included lectures by John himself and Wendell Glick, slide programs that I conducted, displays of Thoreau first editions and manuscripts organized by Harold Kittleson, and live flute and other period music, including a performance of one of Thoreau's favorite songs, "Tom Bowling." These "Walden in the Woods" seminars were held at conference centers located in a beautiful woodland preserve and a landscape arboretum, locations chosen by John to provide the proper atmosphere for teaching and learning about Thoreau. John's death is a great loss for Thoreau scholarship in Minnesota, but his work is not lost; and the foundations he helped build for future Thoreau studies are solidly in place.

John's survivors include his wife Rosemarie, daughters Elizabeth and Emily Dolan, son Sean, four grandchildren, his mother Dorothy Dolan, brothers Edward and Michael, and a sister, Eileen Dolan.

Services were held on 8 October at the Holy Family Catholic Church in St. Louis Park, Minnesota.

**I am under an awful necessity
to be what I am.**

Journal, 21 December 1851

Obituary: Charlotte Adams

Matt Dees

[**Editor's Note:** The following article is reprinted from the *Chapel Hill News* (North Carolina), where it appeared on 2 August 2005. We are grateful to staff writer Matt Dees and to the publisher, the News & Observer Publishing Company, for granting us permission to reprint.]

Charlotte Adams spoke softly but carried a big olive branch. The longtime peace and civil rights activist, who died Thursday at age 102, cut her feisty spirit and unwavering idealism with a dose of Southern gentility. When former Gov. Jim Hunt sent her well wishes on her 90th birthday, Adams thanked him, of course. But then she chastised him for not pardoning the "Wilmington 10," a group of civil rights activists convicted of bombing a grocery store before authorities learned the group had been framed. She hadn't forgotten this failing, even though she brought it up more than 10 years after the fact.

"She was a small little woman, a little bit tart but not too much so," said Adams' niece, Shirley Vanclay of Chapel Hill. "She called everyone 'dear.' She treated everybody in the same kind of open and friendly way." Adams made her mark over eight decades in Chapel Hill, speaking out against war, segregation and socioeconomic disparity. She founded the local branch of the

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in 1935 and the state's first dispute mediation center in 1977. Her sun porch on Patterson Place, just behind the Chi Psi fraternity house, was a frequent venue for vigorous political debate over afternoon tea. She had to leave that house in 2001 after she fractured her hip trying to climb over a stone wall during her daily trip to the post office. She and husband Raymond, an English professor at UNC-Chapel Hill who died in 1987, built that home in 1940. She led a weekly vigil protesting the Vietnam War for seven years in front of the Franklin Street post office. Adams continued those activities well into her 90s, attending monthly meetings of the Women's International League and writing letters to national leaders urging them to seek peaceful resolutions to conflict. That guiding philosophy led her to create the Dispute Settlement Center. She and two other women sat through hours of court proceedings to make sure minorities and long-haired young men received fair treatment. During those hours, they realized many of the disputes were petty ones between neighbors, so they spent years trying to persuade local leaders to fund a program that would keep such disagreements from clogging the court system. Today, the Dispute Settlement Center of Orange County is a nonprofit that helps policy-makers, business leaders and individuals solve differences collaboratively. "I think it's sort of a capstone of all the human relations work she did over so many years," said Frances Henderson, the center's director. Adams stories abound, and Dan Pollitt, a former UNC law professor who often was her partner in protest, has lots of them. She put up her own house as bond (without telling her husband) to bail out a Vietnam draftee who refused to serve, Pollitt said. She was pepper sprayed in the 1960s after she and five UNC housekeepers refused to leave the governor's office before he met with them to discuss state workers' low wages, Pollitt said. Perhaps the best-known occurrence happened when the pair led protests for months outside Chapel Hill's two movie theaters in 1961, trying to integrate them. One rainy night, as a small group marched outside the Carolina Theatre, the manager came out with an umbrella, held it over Adams' head and walked with her. She no doubt appreciated the gentlemanly gesture. But, Pollitt said: "That didn't make up for it in her eyes. He should have opened the theater to everyone. Then she wouldn't have had to be out there in the first place." A memorial service will be held at Carolina Meadows Retirement Center at 1 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 20. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be directed to any of the organizations Adams supported.



John Mack—An Appreciation

John Mack died suddenly in England on 27 September 2005. John was a board member and treasurer of both the Thoreau Society and the Thoreau Farm Trust. In an active retirement John supported conservation, environmental-protection, and historic-preservation efforts in his two hometowns of Concord and Chatham, Massachusetts. He was a regular participant in Concord

Town Meetings and ready with positions on local issues, supporting them vigorously. With his wife Lorna, he was known for his very warm and generous hospitality to Thoreauvians attending the Society's Annual Gatherings, lectures, and board meetings. He helped organize the all-day, cover-to-cover reading of *Walden* during the 2004 Annual Gathering that celebrated the 150th anniversary of the book's publication. He was a leading and enthusiastic supporter of the project to preserve Thoreau's birth house.

Born in Brooklyn in 1924, John Mack graduated from St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, in the Class of 1945 and from Harvard Business School in 1950. He served in the infantry in World War II in the Pacific, receiving a Silver Star. As a marketing executive he worked at Welches, Proctor & Gamble, Clairol, and Gillette. From 1976 to 1992 he was President of Carter Products in New York City.

When living in New Jersey, John served on the Township Committee of East Amwell and served as Deputy Mayor. He was a Trustee of St. John's College.

John is survived by his wife, Lorna Carey Mack; his sisters, Anne Dean and Mary Hurst; his daughters, Pamela Mack, Sheila Mack, Carey Weber, and Lorna Sheridan; and seven grandchildren.

A memorial service celebrating John's life was held at the First Parish Church in Concord on 29 October. Family members recalled John as one who loved family and loved life, a person who was optimistic about what was possible and passionate in his support of measures to make the world better.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Thoreau Society at 55 Old Bedford Road or to the Thoreau Farm Trust at Box 454, both in Concord, MA 01742 U.S.A. Lorna Mack may be reached at 47 Lexington Road in Concord.



John Mack Working at the Thoreau Birth House

Ethel Seybold (1910-2005)

[Editor's Note: We are grateful to Mr. Dave Bonney for bringing this item to our attention and to Ms. Julie Boren of Campbell Publications for permission to reprint this portion of the anonymous obituary that appeared in *Pike Press* (Pike County, Illinois) newspaper on 13 October 2005.]

Dr. Ethel Louise Seybold, 95, of Perry [Illinois], died Tuesday, Oct. 4, 2005, at Illini Community Hospital in Pittsfield [Illinois]. . . . Dr. Seybold graduated from Perry Community High School in 1925 and from Illinois College in Jacksonville in 1929 with a major in Latin and a minor in Greek. She received a number of undergraduate honors including the Tanner Prize in Latin, the designation of "most promising student," Rammelkamp Scholarships, Special Honors, and Final Honors. A scholarship student at the University of Missouri, she earned a master's degree in classics from that institution. She began her

teaching career at the high schools of Pleasant Hill and Monticello [Illinois]. Later, as a university fellow at Yale University, she earned master's and doctorate degrees in English. She then returned to her undergraduate alma mater, Illinois College, to join the faculty of the English department. Wherever she was, she made a contribution. At Illinois College, in the absence of an alumni secretary, she assumed that position for two years. During that time, she taught in the English department in the morning, supervising the alumni office in the afternoon and often composed the Quarterly after midnight. As alumni secretary, she designed and produced the first Illinois College commemorative plates. As co-chairman and chairman of the English department, she was largely instrumental in establishing the Claridge Lectureship in English Studies. As a scholar, she was the author of a book, "Thoreau, the Quest and the Classics," published by the Yale University Press in 1952 and reissued in 1969. She was a member of the editorial board of the Princeton edition of Thoreau's works, 1967-1971, when she was forced by ill health to relinquish teaching, although she did not formally retire until 1975. Having already received the distinguished alumnus award from the college, she was given on her retirement the title of professor emeritus, and the honorary degree of doctor of humane letters. Her last contributions to scholarship were published in *Studies in the American Renaissance*, 1994.

Presidential Address, 2005 Annual Gathering

Robert N. Hudspeth

To be quite candid, I have found this annual address to be a hard one to write. I can't, for the life of me, get the famous opening of *A Tale of Two Cities* out of my mind: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." When I look back at what I said here last year, I remember that my theme was paradox, and I find now that it still is. But that ought not to surprise any of us, for that is what life mostly is—a continuing experience of opposites that we manage to negotiate from day to day. We all, of course, like to dwell on what we have done well and to keep in the background the problems that tag along. We have a right to celebrate the activities Jayne [Gordon] has outlined for us; we have made ourselves felt in many places and in many ways. In these ways it is indeed, "the best of times."

So why am I ambivalent? Where is the problem? I owe it to you to be clear and unambiguous: *it is money*. As your President, I am deeply troubled by our many-year record of deficit spending. Currently, the arithmetic is simple: in round figures, we now have a budget of US\$308,000 and an income of US\$269,000. You know from what Joe Wheeler has just said that this is a sizeable deficit that has eaten into our reserves. I simply do not see how we can continue to do this, but neither can I see a clear solution without drastic, painful action. Let me assure you that if there were an obvious, easy answer to this problem we would have found it long ago! There simply is no such solution.

But putting the problem in this way throws us back on a previous question. To know what it takes "to be fiscally sound," to answer the question of why we spend what we spend, we need first to know what we *are* as "The Thoreau Society." What does the

membership expect us to *do* from day to day? Do we have a "mission" that requires us to have a budget of US\$308,000 or not? It is these questions that the Board is asking and trying to answer. Dave Ganoe and our Development Committee have begun to lead us in a useful and necessary fund-raising effort, and we have been reviewing a long-range plan that Dave has written for us. We find that we have not yet defined ourselves clearly, and so we have trouble convincing the larger world to join with us and support the Society. Part of our fund-raising plan will, of course, have us ask the membership to strengthen its commitment through the Annual Giving appeal and through estate planning. We have, for instance, almost completed a formal endowment agreement with the Lowell Foundation. Watch for announcements in the near future.

But there remains a fundamental contradiction: we are a society whose origins were limited and local but one that has in the

I said last year that in the words of St. Paul, "I see through a glass darkly," and confound it, the glass got darker, not lighter this past year. I can only repeat the dying words of Goethe, who said, "Light—more light."

Now that I have gotten this off my chest, I will close as I did last year, for I thoroughly believe (the pun is deliberate) in what we are doing. I, too, have no wish to write an ode to dejection. Let us enjoy our fellowship together. Let's learn more; let's argue about Thoreau's ideas. Let visions of what it means to be Thoreauvian compete among us. It's a great day: we are about to hear a splendid address from Professor Kammen; go to the Masonic Temple this afternoon and speak up in the sessions. Make yourself heard. Take a walk, canoe on the river tomorrow morning, go out and walk the Estabrook woods with Steve Ells. Problems? Sure, of course we have them, but who doesn't? But we all remember how *Walden* concludes: "There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star." Wise words.

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past decade grown into an ambitious educational program with large, fixed expenses. We have not bridged the gap between our origins and our ambitions.

As I have said, the Board is developing strategies, but my concern is that time is not our ally. If we do find workable solutions, we will be forced into a different state of being.

There is, of course, an obvious irony in dwelling so obsessively on money. I fear that Henry David would mock us—out: I can live with that irony, for I do believe it is necessary that more of our fellow citizens in this time of peril and fear do learn that honest and honorable living can be created, that joy *can* be the center of existence, and that mean-spirited selfishness shall *not* finally be what it means to be human.

All of us on the Board invite your comments and ideas. The membership is diverse and thoughtful, and we need to be more aware of what you are thinking. We need to know what matters most about the Thoreau Society to you. I invite your comments, either in person as the Gathering proceeds, by mail or email (my address is pruessner@earthlink.net); let me hear from you.

Birth-House Campaign Swings into High Gear

Joseph Wheeler

Thoreau Farm Trust President Lucille Stott recently announced that the Trust has embarked on a major campaign to raise the US\$800,000 needed to obtain title to the house in which Henry David Thoreau was born. As reported in *Thoreau Society Bulletin* 248, the Town of Concord agreed last year to sell the house and two acres to the Trust for one dollar if the Trust can raise US\$800,000 needed for restoration. Meanwhile, the Trust has agreed to make part of the house available to the Thoreau Society for its international headquarters. The Society will bring its expertise to the site's educational programming. The Society's Board has endorsed the campaign and a number of Board members have already contributed.

The Trust's Board notes that its fundraising goal amounts to eight hundred gifts of US\$1,000. Of course, gifts of any size are welcome, and several contributions of much larger size have already been received. The Trust encourages friends of this project to join together to make collective contributions, perhaps in the name of a school or university, a department, a neighborhood, or a family. Multi-year pledges are also welcome. All gifts will be acknowledged and will be honored with permanent recognition at the house.

Historic Architect Larry Sorli and Historic Materials Conservator Bill Finch are already at work on their studies of the house and on preliminary design for the restoration/rehabilitation project. In their view, the upstairs "east chamber," where, according to William Ellery Channing, Jr., Thoreau was born, remains the most historically intact part of the house.

A group of Concord scientists and engineers, known as the "Green Team," has agreed to work with the architects to use the latest environmental technology in the restoration. The Trust's Board feels that this project should help bring Thoreau's legacy into the future by serving as a model of energy-sustainable design. It will be particularly instructive to show visitors to Thoreau Farm how a historic house can be restored using environmentally

friendly principles while continuing to maintain its historical integrity.

In the long run, when it has been able to build an education center, the Trust will make the history of agriculture in Concord another educational priority at the site. Brian Donahue, a founding member of the Trust's Board, has recently published *The Great Meadow: Farmers and the Land in Colonial Massachusetts*, which describes the sustainable-agricultural system followed by Concord's farmers during the two hundred years before Thoreau's birth. The Trust is consulting with Donahue on ways to use this property as a way to celebrate the rich farming tradition that shaped the landscape during Thoreau's time and that continues to help define Concord today.

Thoreau Society members wanting more information about the birth-house campaign can go to the Trust's website at www.thoreaufarm.org. Two articles about Thoreau Farm that I published in the 1999 issue of *The Concord Saunterer* are posted on the website, and a third article by Leslie Perrin Wilson describes the "widow's thirds" that Thoreau's grandmother inherited from Jonas Minot. Contributions and pledges to be paid over several years can be sent to the Thoreau Farm Trust, Inc., Box 545, Concord MA 01742 U.S.A. Nancy Grohol, the Trust's Executive Director, can be reached by e-mail at Nancy@thoreaufarm.org or by telephone at 1-978-369-3091.



"The old-fashioned house on Virginia Road, its roof nearly reaching to the ground, remains as it was when Henry David Thoreau first saw the light in the easternmost of its upper chambers. It was the residence of his grandmother, and a perfect piece of our New England style building with its gray, unpainted boards, its grassy, unfenced door-yard. The house is somewhat isolate and remote from thoroughfares; the Virginia Road, an old-fashioned, winding, at-length-deserted pathway, the more smiling for its forked orchards, tumbling walls, and mossy banks. About the house are pleasant meadows, deep with their beds of peat, so cheering with its homely, hearthlike fragrance, and in front runs a constant stream."

—William Ellery Channing, "Channing's Thoreau: The Poet Naturalist Portrayed by his Nearest Friend," in Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, *Literary Studies and Criticism: Evaluations of Writers of the American Renaissance*, edited by Kenneth Cameron (Hartford: Transcendental Books, 1980), p. 328.

Notes & Queries

☞ Richard Winslow III has sent us yet another important newspaper find, this one being a brief and remarkably error-filled obituary that nonetheless captures something of the tenor of Thoreau's life. It appeared in *The Sun* (Baltimore) on 10 May 1862, p. 4, col. 3: "DEATH OF A WELL-KNOWN WRITER.—Henry D. Thoreau, a well-known writer, and a most eccentric man, died at Concord, Mass., of consumption, on the 7th inst. He was a disciple of Ralph Waldo Emerson, and was thought to possess genius of a certain stamp. His age was about 35. He was an intense admirer of nature, and much more successful than Alexander Selkirk in finding the charms of solitude. He passed nearly a year living alone in a little hut on the wild shores of a New England river.

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www.shopatwaldenpond.org

Here he lived on an infinitely small sum of money, tilling the ground and hunting the woods for his support in day time, and in the long twilights sitting by the door of his log house reading the Greek and Latin poets."

☞ A *National Geographic* article (October 2005) on the history of the refrigerator says, "Two centuries ago refrigeration depended on natural ice. Entrepreneurs in New England hacked it from ponds—even Thoreau's Walden Pond—and shipped it in massive blocks to Calcutta or Singapore."

☞ According to the Wilmington (Del.) *News Journal* (15 September 2005), the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in 2004 that a Pennsylvania law requiring display of the flag and recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools was unconstitutional. Judge Dolores K. Sloviter wrote in the ruling, "The rights embodied in the Constitution, most particularly in the First Amendment, protect the minority—those persons who march to their own drummers."

☞ Barksdale Maynard, whose *Walden Pond: A History* is now in paperback from Oxford University Press, writes that he is continuing to collect accounts of visits to Walden Pond. A pathologist in New York recently recalled his friendship with Robert Frost, whom he met as a student at Amherst (1951-55). "That was the beginning of a close avuncular friendship that would continue to grow and flourish until he died in 1963. When Frost was based in Amherst and had readings in other places in New England, I would often drive him, returning either to Amherst or to Cambridge. One time, on the way to Cambridge from Amherst, he asked me if I had ever seen Walden Pond. I hadn't, and so we made a detour and found the pond; we were disappointed to see it sadly neglected with lots of litter." Jack W. C. Hagstrom, "Reciprocal Walks with Robert Frost," *Caxtonian* (September 2003) (<http://www.caxtonclub.org/reading/2003/Sep/frost.htm>).

☞ We mentioned in the last Bulletin the recent sale at Christies of Thoreau's inscribed copy of *Walden* to Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Bookseller and Society member Jim Dawson tells us that the folks at Christies told him that the selling price of US\$216,000 "amazed everyone, but it was due to the extreme scarcity of inscribed *Waldens*. Apparently the notes Higginson made inside [the book] were of little interest in [and] of themselves." One Drapkin, the person who put the volume up for auction, purchased it from a dealer some years ago, and that dealer probably bought it privately. Christies described this as being among the top five or ten most lucrative sales of an American book at auction (presumably this year). There is no record that the Drapkin copy ever appeared at auction before, and the new owner wishes to remain anonymous. Incidentally, the last inscribed *Walden* to appear at auction was the one to H. G. O. Blake, which brought a scant US\$3,700 in 1980. Interestingly, according to Dawson, Thoreau's inscribed copy of *A Week* to Higginson sold at auction in 1995 (part of the Englehart collection) and brought US\$23,000 hammer price, which does not include the buyer's premium.

☞ Jim Dawson informed us that someone on e-Bay purporting

to hail from Swanzy, New Hampshire, was attempting to pass off the adjoining image (apparently a tintype) as, you perhaps might not guess it, but, yes, Henry David Thoreau. The seller posted this image with a few others, one of which was an undated advertisement by Rinhart Galleries of Colebrook, Connecticut, offering a reward of US\$10,000 “for information leading to the purchase of an original ambrotype or dageurreotype of this man”—and showing the Dunshee ambrotype of Thoreau. The Rinhart ad appears to have been torn from a newspaper or perhaps a magazine. In any case, we ought not be overly concerned because there are presumably optometrists in the Swanzy area who would be able to help the poor sufferer.



☞ Mark Perry devotes much time in *Grant and Twain: The Story of an American Friendship* (Random House, 2004) to telling about Ulysses S. Grant writing his memoirs while suffering terminal throat cancer and about Mark Twain's friendship with Grant, as well as Twain's own writing projects at the time, which included finishing *Huckleberry Finn*. Here's a relevant excerpt (p. 235): “Ernest Hemingway once wrote that ‘all modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*.’ That may well be true for American fiction, but it is not true for American nonfiction, which is our nation's most lasting and important gift to the world. Americans love nonfiction—we are a nation consumed by politics and history. If Twain, as Hemingway supposes, wrote the quintessential American novel, then Grant, his friend, wrote the single most important work of nonfiction in our literature: It ranks with *Walden* as a symbol of the American character. Grant's book is not simply a profound narrative written with ‘dynamic force’; it is, as Twain rightly described it, ‘a literary masterpiece.’ Grant attempted to tell *our* story to *us*—and he succeeded.”

☞ The *Thoreau Society Bulletin* is one of ten publications described in Chris Dodge's “Street Librarian” column in the November/December 2005 issue of *Utne* magazine, this issue of the column titled “Words From the Grass Roots: In Praise of the Little Newsletter.”

☞ Scott Swanson is selling Manuscript Edition set number 362, which has a full “Walking” manuscript leaf (writing on recto only) tipped into the front flyleaf of volume one. The manuscript contains an early draft of the passage about naming and the child's rigmarole, *Iery wiery, ichery van, tittle tol tan*. Contact Swanson at (617) 536-8013 or SSWAN37678@aol.com for more information on the set.

☞ Joe Mansueto, the founder, chairman, and chief executive officer of Morningstar, Inc., a leading global investment research firm, started his company twenty-one years ago in a one-bedroom apartment with \$80,000 in personal savings. Earlier this year Mansueto, who is a five-time Inc. 500 winner, took Morningstar public using an online Dutch auction (Google earlier and more famously did the same). Mansueto says he derived the name of his company from the final sentence of *Walden*: “The sun is but a morning star.” He sees Thoreau's values as “values of simplicity, independence, and thrift.”

☞ Stuart Walton's *A Natural History of Human Emotions* (Grove Press, 2004), in the last paragraph of a chapter on sadness, refers to a short story (“Me and My Son”) by Elizabeth Stoddard, “America's presiding muse of existential disappointment.” About Laura Calton, Stoddard's character in this story, Walton writes, “Laura Calton readily acknowledges that Thoreau or Emerson, those bracing apostles of the American landscape's wide open spaces, would each have delighted in the vista of radiant sky, mountainous white clouds and distantly susurating sea that is entirely wasted on her....”

☞ The mass of housewives lead lives of quiet desperation. From the desperate kitchen they go into the desperate living room, and have to console themselves with the antics of puppies and kittens—not to say neighbors, friends, and family members. From a monologue on the popular television program *Desperate Housewives*: “My name is Mary Alice Young, and before I died my life was filled with love, laughter, friendship, and, sadly—secrets.... And I was living a life of quiet desperation. I'd feel it every morning as I made breakfast for my husband ... and during the errands I ran in the afternoon ... even at my work every evening.”

☞ Dianne Piper-Rybak of *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau* recently responded to a query on the WaldenList Yahoo Group about the gap in the publication of the Princeton Edition's journal volumes: “*Journal 8* was published before *Journal 7* because the editor of *Journal 8*, Sandra Harbert Petrulionis, did most of the work as her dissertation and it was completed relatively quickly.... [A]t this time, we are projecting *Excursions* (ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer) to be published in 2006, *Journal 7* (eds. Nancy Craig Simmons and Ron Thomas) in 2007, and *Correspondence 1: 1836-1848* (ed. Robert Hudspeth) in 2009, with *Correspondence 2: 1849-1856* following in 2010.... [T]he unedited text of what will be [*Journal 9* through *Journal 16*] in the print version (sans apparatus) is available online at http://www.library.ucsb.edu/thoreau/writings_journals.html. (The online text covers September 3, 1854 through April 7, 1859.)”

☞ The chapter “What is a House?” in Robert Pogue Harrison's study of burial and commemoration, *The Dominion of the Dead* (U. of Chicago Press, 2003), includes this assertion: “In



Thoreau Society Members Atop Mt. Katahdin, August 2005
Left to right: Mike Frederick, Charles Phillips, Denise Morrissey, Ken Voorhees, Dan Phillips, and Ruth Olsen

the history of Western philosophy there is only one thinker whose vocation as a philosopher took the form of building a house—not the ‘house of Being,’ but a house in which to live: Henry David Thoreau.” Harrison referred even more extensively to Thoreau in his previous book, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (U. of Chicago Press, 1992).

After his brief article “Another ‘New’ Thoreau Letter” appeared in the last number of the *Bulletin*, Brad Dean had a few readers point out to him another bit of evidence supporting the hypothesis that Thoreau received the form letter discussed in the article. In his letter to Thoreau dated 27 June 1854, Harvard librarian Thaddeus William Harris mentions that he was “very busy with putting the Library in order for examination, & want[ed] every book to be in its place....” Dean might also have pointed out in his article the following Harvard regulation requiring the librarian to recall all books each June: “Every person, without exception, having books from the Library, shall return them, as soon, at the latest, as the fourth Wednesday before Commencement [i.e. the last Wednesday of June]; and all the books shall be retained in the Library, from and after said day, for the annual examination, till the end of the term” (*Statutes and Laws of Harvard University, Relative for Undergraduates* [Cambridge, Mass.: E. W. Metcalf and Co., 1832], p. 38). We are pleased to report that the good folks at the Princeton Edition found Dean’s evidence compelling enough to decide that they will include the form letter in the second of the three projected volumes of Thoreau’s correspondence, which as mentioned above will include letters written and received during the period 1849-1856.

Congratulations to Barksdale Maynard, whose *Walden Pond: A History* received a certificate of commendation from the American Association for State and Local History (2005), and was given the Julia Ward Howe Special Award for 2005 by the Boston Authors Club.

Additions to the Thoreau Bibliography

Robert N. Hudspeth

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2006 Annual Gathering Mountains, Seashores, and Moonlight: Thoreau’s Exploration of Wildness

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or

info@thoreausociety.org

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- Please submit items for the Winter
Bulletin to your editor before
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New announcements and more detailed descriptions of events are available at
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Announcements

COMING THIS WINTER TO THE CONCORD AREA

Window on Walden: Author series at the Shop at Walden Pond.

Life With Principle: A six-part discussion series in conjunction with the new DVD (the first of many programs to be held throughout this country and abroad). *Parlor Entertainments*: A

19th-century evening at the Burke House, the Thoreau Society's office.

Calendar of Events

29, 30 DECEMBER 2005

MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONVENTION

Both Thoreau Society sessions, one 29 December, 8:30–9:45 A.M., the other 30 December, 1:45–3:00 P.M., will take place at the Wardman Park Marriott Hotel, Washington, D.C.

3 FEBRUARY to 3 MARCH 2006

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